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## Special Considerations



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"Kindness in words creates confidence.  
Kindness in thinking creates profoundness.  
Kindness in giving creates love."

- Lao-tzu





## Special Considerations

### SHARED FACILITIES

Sometimes the most feasible location for a child care program is in a space which is also used by other groups. While this isn't an ideal situation it may be the most appropriate. If your child care or school age program must share its facility with other groups or programs, you will likely need to set up and take down your materials on a regular basis. Here are some helpful tips for this challenging situation.

Since you will need to set up and break down your materials frequently, the system created for storing and moving these materials becomes important. Rolling carts can be used to move large boxes, baskets and plastic tubs filled with supplies and games. You can set out only what's needed for an activity while leaving the remainder in the basket / tub as both daily and long term storage. This system reduces the number of trips needed from a storage area and provides for quick, easy set up and efficiency of movement. Ideally, secure storage will be available for the rolling carts.

Sharing a facility with other users should not dissuade you from having soft furniture on hand to

place around the room / area. You can quickly set out small items like soft chairs, cushions, and area rugs, as well as hang pictures on the walls, to create a comfortable, relaxed environment for the children.

A diagram of the space and activity areas is a good tool for enlisting the help of assistants, teachers' aides, volunteers and children in setting up the areas without requiring too much oversight. This enables an efficient set-up process and encourages a spirit of teamwork and mutual support.

### SERVING CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Whenever possible, you should consider the advantages of serving families with special needs children. Beyond just serving a special population, integrating children with special needs into your program has the potential to enrich the lives of everyone involved. The term "special needs" covers a wide variety of conditions: physical and mental disabilities, developmental delays, learning disabilities, children at risk due to neglect or abuse, severe behavioral problems, hyperactivity, cerebral palsy, and attention deficit disorder, to name a few.

It is both rewarding and challenging to provide a high quality program that includes children with special needs. Some helpful resources, listed in

the Appendix, provide guidance with programming, policies and daily activities. The resources contain ideas for ways arrange your classrooms so that you can provide easy access to activities and special accommodations that can help a child participate in regular center activities with safety, ease and dignity. The specific dimensions for some of these features are found in the *Washington State Regulations for Barrier-Free Facilities and Building Elements Designed For Children's Use*.

One of the most important considerations for children in wheelchairs or those using crutches or braces, is their need for wide, clear entrances and walkways and enough clear floor area at activity areas and tables to accommodate wheelchairs or crutches. Children in wheelchairs will need special tables so they can reach the work surface, or tray tables that attach to the wheelchair. Children with disabilities who are able to stand can benefit from support brackets at table edges, including water and sand tables, which brace and stabilize the torso.

Keep in mind that special work surfaces for children with disabilities should be located directly adjacent to other children doing the same activity, and that you should provide extra chairs, or some other opportunity, for friends to share in activities.

Platforms and raised floor areas can be modified to present opportunities for children with disabilities to exercise and strengthen underused muscles and limbs. Consider providing ramps with cleats, ropes or grab bars for children to pull themselves up to the raised platform level. Non-slip surfaces on floors and ramps help greatly, especially at wet areas.

Should you care for a school age child in diapers, you must provide a diaper changing area that is private and sensitive to the child's needs. It can also be helpful to provide large, private bathing facilities for the times when a child who cannot clean him / herself needs special assistance.

When caring for a child with hearing impairments, configure the furniture so that there are plenty of visual connections, rather than barriers, between different areas within the classroom. This will enable the deaf child to see the activities of other children and stay connected through visual communications.

Uncluttered surfaces and edges (for tactile guidance) and textural changes in flooring surfaces provide orientation clues and greatly assist visually impaired children in developing confidence and stability as they move through the world. Special swings, tumblers, rockers, and soft furnishings without irregular protruding edges, are also useful when



Reggio Children



caring for a child with visual impairments. Children with limited vision need task specific artificial lighting, such as table lamps with adjustable lighting levels, to help them through their activities.

There are a number of commercial vendors with adaptive equipment such as described above. Be sure to consult with the parents of children with special needs. They may be the best source for identifying equipment that their child may need and for specific techniques they have found that successfully normalize their child's daily routines.

### **NIGHTTIME CARE / EXTENDED HOURS CARE**

Many communities find there is a need for childcare beyond conventional work week hours and you may want to consider filling this need with your program. As with all the special considerations in this section, careful planning from the start will make this service more feasible.

Children attending your program during the evening hours will have different needs than those attending during the day. For instance, a good night's sleep is essential for a child's development, and sound sleep cannot be sustained for long periods on typical nap cots or mats on the floor. If children are present

through the night, consider providing beds rather than cots or mats. There may also be special storage considerations for children in extended hours care.

If you are providing a child care program during the daytime hours as well, you may need to provide a separate classroom for the children in extended hours care, depending on the hours of arrival and departure you will need to accommodate.

Consider, too, the location of the classroom(s) used for extended hours care. Where are they best located to reduce feelings of isolation and increase a sense of community and security? What support spaces will be needed during extended hours care, so that you can locate those close to these classrooms?

Some children who require care during non-conventional hours have adopted the waking / sleeping cycle of the care-giving parent working swing or night shifts. These children need access to indoor activity spaces for gross motor play, as well as other standard classroom activity areas.